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The CIA Dispute

Case History On The Art Of 'Leaking' Information

Agency's Role In Cuban Fiasco Revealed Despite Official Silence

By GEORGE JENKS
Blade Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON—One of the oddest aspects of the ill-fated invasion of Cuba is that never before or after the shooting started did the United States Government issue any authoritative explanation of its part in the uprising against the Castro regime.

Being the fiasco that it was, the Cuban affair is something everyone in this country would like to forget, yet it does constitute an interesting case history on the spread of information by leaks and by indirection.

While the buildup for the invasion was taking place, there was a tight lid on Washington news sources. The same was not true of Miama, Fla., traditional listening post for Latin-American affairs.

The word from Miama early this month bore out Fidel Castro's warnings of an impending invasion of Cuba.

The first official word from the White House came at a news conference April 12 when President Kennedy proclaimed a hands-off policy toward Cuba.

He stated specifically that there would be no intervention in Cuba by U.S. forces; that he opposed the mounting of any invasion from this country and that he would do anything in his power to prevent U.S. citizens from fighting in Cuba.

THAT APPEARED to settle the question, but within a few days there were "leaks," apparently from State Department sources, to the effect that a dispute was raging within the Kennedy administration over the question of supporting an anti-Castro invasion.

Following the dismal collapse of the invasion, the finger of blame quickly was pointed at the Central Intelligence Agency which was accused—again through "leaks" from administration sources—of bringing the rebel cause to grief through faulty intelligence work.

The President [illegible] this view. While he said he accepted full responsibility for this Government's actions, he immediately ordered an investigation of the CIA by retired Gen. Maxwell B. Taylor and by his brother, Attorney General Robert F Kennedy.

Then the CIA struck back with a denial of any past mistakes. Before an informal briefing session of a group of newspaper editors—which by pure coincidence happened to be assembled in Washington in the wake of the Cuban crisis—appeared "a highly placed official of the CIA."

THIS OFFICIAL denied that the CIA had misjudged Cuban armed strength or determination and declared the agency had submitted a report—presumably to the White House—painting a true picture of the situation on the eve of the invasion.

Because of the rules prevailing at such informal government briefings, the name of the CIA official did not appear in connection with what he said. The only clue to his identity is the fact that one of the speakers listed for the editors' seminar was Allen W. Dulles, CIA director.

All this recrimination and finger-pointing made interesting, if puzzling, reading. It obviously was not enjoyed however, by Mr. Kennedy and other administration leaders.

Speaking before the American Newspaper Publishers Association last week, the President brought up the question of self-restraint on the part of newspapers in printing all the facts they learn. He asked publishers to ask themselves: "Is this [illegible] Mr. Kennedy is by no [illegible] let in on it.

means the first American president to be annoyed by information leaks within his administration. Nor will he be the first president to learn that the only way to prevent publication of leaked news is to plug the leaks at the source.

The "background briefing" or the "off-the-record" disclosure is the oldest known method of letting cats out of the bag in the dark. It is best described as a means of disseminating news, opinion or rumor without identification of the source.

Presidents themselves have often made use of the device. Franklin D Roosevelt used to go "off the record" frequently at crowded press conferences. The resultant stories, attributed to "a high White House source," fooled no one but they did give him a chance to deny he had said it or claim that he was misquoted.

With the televising of White House news conferences, the "off-the-record" dodge has fallen out of presidential use but it still abounds at lower government levels.

IT IS PARTICULARLY prevalent among the military who have been fond of planting critical (and anonymous) comment on prevailing arms policies.

It was this that Secretary of the Navy John B. Connally, Jr., had in mind this month when he warned his officers against talking with the press at all unless they were willing to have their names associated with their statements.

While President Kennedy frowns on loose-talking officials, his administration—like its predecessors—often makes use of planted "leaks" from unnamed White House sources as a means of testing public or congressional reaction to proposed policies.

The Cuban affair made clear to the Administration what Washington learned long ago: that while one man can be trusted to keep a secret, the odds against keeping that secret fall rapidly in proportion [illegible]